

About Decision Partners

- Expert center for basic and applied cognitive behavioral science.
- Inventor and developers of mental modeling, a management process for understanding and influencing the psychological processes of judgment and decision making that guide behavior. Sole commercial source of mental modeling and Mental Modeling Technology©.
- Most experienced applications company for mental modeling and mental models research....hundreds of applications involving thousands of people worldwide anthrax to nuclear license renewal and opera in the middle.
- Today: a voice from the front for risk perception, risk communication, social friction, risk-based stakeholder engagement and public judgment.

What You've Been Saying

- Social behavior
- Human and social dynamics
- Stakeholders
- Integrated knowledge modeling
- No simple single solution for a complicated decision problems
- Setting standards to help shape behavior.
- We have weak memories yet still have to think through complex futures
- Social science at the water/human interface
- Build a demand response for new technology and solutions
- Mother Nature is powerful

... And

- Adoption of technology vs. technology transfer.
- Coax people into adopting a cultural shift.
- Need to bring all the stakeholders to the table.
- *WOW* – people can think about natural phenomena and adequacy of solutions completely differently than the science “says” and the scientists!
- Our thinking has never evolved beyond sea monsters and catastrophes...maybe we need to reprogram our thinking.

Considerations from the Front

- Mental models, studied since the 1930's: tacit webs of belief and underlying rationale that guide learning, interpretation of communications, judgment, decision making and behavior.
- From studying mental models:
 - Nothing changes until behavior changes.
 - Experts are out of phase with the thinking of laypeople.

Considerations

- Most strategies and communications are ad hoc, driven by theories, intuitions, opinions, even bad attitudes, and guesswork about people's thinking, information needs for decision making and how they will interpret communications.
- Typically there is no formal analysis of what people are thinking and how they are thinking about it and how they are making decisions today.

Considerations

- Technology transfer doesn't.
- Values shape facts and facts shape values, with values often being most important.
- Change compels choice. Choice compels risk.
- Risk communication is not about communicating risk.
- People are often offended by earnest efforts to inform and educate them, which of course are the most common communication strategies.
- Judgment and opinion are not the same and the tools required to understand them are not interchangeable.

Further

- People deserve respect: no audiences, targets, publics, on “them and those”, no spin, no PR, no “messaging”, no unsolicited advice.
- We are all each other’s stakeholders – and who are we? We have a right to have a say in decisions that affect us.
- It is not up to them to “get it”. It’s up to the communicator to achieve understanding.

Possible Guidance

- Start by questioning your own thinking and mental models that guide your answering four key questions:
 - What best to do?
 - What best to say?
 - How best to do it?
 - How best to say it?
- General approach: Build on where people are at today in their thinking, tailoring communications to the critical decisions at hand.

Possible Guidance

- Make every effort to think with people. Avoid thinking for them.
- Traps:
 - Any thinking about engineering the values and thinking of others.
 - Practicing avoidance.
 - Teaching people what you know: people don't care what you know. They want to know you care.
 - Disclosure and transparency as effective risk communication.
 - In the absence of the appropriate empirical research, it is possible to confidently predict how people think and how they will interpret communication.

More Traps

- Information is communication.
- Numbers will speak for themselves.
- Dialogue is just another form of discussion or debate.
- Counting on awareness and understanding...if we can just get them thinking about the facts and emerging problems.....
- And not fully understanding the universe of stakeholders...

New Stakeholders

- Icelandic elves and trolls....they don't have cash but they have ash.
- (Don't mess with Mother Nature and the stewards of whom she is most fond).